

Henceforth our regular items 'What's on Today, Tomorrow', 'Weather', 'Here & There' will be published on Page 8.

US envoy calls on PM

US Ambassador to Bangladesh Mary Ann Peters called on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at her Gahabhaban official residence in the city yesterday evening, reports BSS.

The envoy apprised the Prime Minister that all preparations have been completed to make her visit to US a fruitful and splendid one.

Peters said the USA treats Bangladesh as a land of opportunities. She expressed the hope that the visit of Sheikh Hasina would further cement the Dhaka-Washington relations.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina told the US Ambassador that Bangladesh has on principle approved Article 192 of the ILO charter and it would be signed within next one and a half months.

She said child labour would be totally eliminated from Bangladesh and steps would be taken for its rehabilitation.

Expressing her satisfaction over the Prime Minister's assurance, Mary Ann Peters said she would convey it to President Bill Clinton.

The envoy expressed deep sympathy over the flooding of the country's south-western districts and said the USA was examining on what help could be extended for this purpose.

Hasina greets Kim

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday greeted President of the Republic of Korea Kim Dae Jung for winning Nobel Peace Prize in recognition to his initiatives for reducing tension and achieving reconciliation in the Korean Peninsula, reports BSS.

In a message to the Korean leader, the Prime Minister said, "I have learned with great pleasure that the Nobel Committee has decided to award your excellency the Nobel Peace Prize for the year 2000."

She said that this is a reflection of the international community's appreciation of your excellency's peace initiative for reducing tension and for achieving reconciliation in the Korean Peninsula.

The Prime Minister wished good health and happiness for the Korean leader as well as the well being prosperity of the friendly people of the Republic of Korea.

45 applicants to vie for each JU seat

By JU Correspondent

A total of 31005 admission-seekers have submitted application forms to the Jahangirnagar University for 700 first year honours seats for 2000-2001 session.

About 45 applicants will vie for each JU seat this year.

Of the total applicants, 9354 have submitted forms for 'Ka' unit (Science Faculty), 9425 for 'Kha' unit (Social Science Faculty), 5268 for 'Ga' unit (Arts Faculty) and 6958 for 'Gha' unit (Life Science Institute). Yesterday was the last date for submitting admission forms.

The written admission tests for 700 seats in 24 departments under four faculties will be held from October 29 to November 7.

Results of the written tests will be published on December 13, while classes of this session will begin from first week of February, 2001.

Meeting today to overview Satkhira flood situation

An emergency meeting of all cultural activists, artists, litterateurs and intellectuals from Satkhira will be held at 10 am today at 128/Ka, Maghbazar, says a press release.

All interested artists from Satkhira have been requested to attend the meeting to overview and discuss the flood situation in Satkhira.

Those interested to join can also contact the following Tel Nos: 831 4176, 934 4450, 017 520 645, 017 540 556, the release added.

More donation to PM's Relief Fund

Tormod Hermensen, President and Chief Executive of the Norway-based organisation, the Telmore Company, has donated Taka 15 lakh to Prime Minister's Relief and Welfare Fund for flood victims, reports BSS.

Executive Chairman of the Board of Investment (BOI) M Mokammel Haque handed over the cheque to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on behalf of Hermensen at Gano Bhawan last evening.

PSF comes in aid of people's healthcare at Satkhira

By Naimul Haq, back from Satkhira

Almost the entire population in the remote village of Datnakhal, at the foothill of the Sundarbans in Burigoini union in Satkhira ration drinking water round the year.

The reason is the high salinity of water in the place km from the nearest town - at the foot of the Bay touching the Sundarbans.

There are only a few sources of sweet water ponds, locally known as mita paani pukur, in the area from where the people fetch drinking water. People from as far as six to seven kilometres from around the ponds walk there each day to collect water. The crisis is acute in summer when the ponds dry up.

Even then the water they collected caused different diseases among the local inhabitants. Stomach ailments are common in this part of the region.

"Bacteria and other germs are always present in open ponds, so it is quite natural to expect high incidences of such diseases," said a health officer. They are also vulnerable to other water borne diseases, he added saying that another reason for diseases among them was their low intake of water.

But not so anymore. To address the crisis NGO Forum through its partner organisation - Noabeki Gonomukhi Shomobay Samity has set up a pond-sand-filter (PSF) for the locals.

"The technology is not new but is ideal for the region where people are left with no other choice but drink pond water," Sattiya Ranjan Biswas, Branch Manager of the samity said adding, "PSF filters out all sort of micro-organisms and is cost effective as well."

"I used to walk about a mile everyday to fetch water for drinking and cooking," said



Women crowd around the pond-sand-filter at a sweet water pond to collect the filtered water.

Mina Rani, a housewife standing next to a mita paani pond holding a kalshi (pitcher). "We only drank the water from this pond yet my children were sick all around the year. They seem to have stomach diseases all the time. Now the situation has improved a lot."

The beneficiaries deposited about 20 per cent of the initial cost of the filter. Tk 24,000. NGO Forum, an apex body of more than 500 NGOs and community based organisations (CBOs) working in the field, provided the financial and technical support.

Since it started about a month ago more people have been com-

ing to this filter set up by a mita pukur as they realised the benefit of filtered water to their health. It has proved so popular that the local people have appealed to the NGO Forum to set up more pond-sand-filters at other ponds of the region. NGO Forum has already initiated steps to set up three more in the area.

People still have to walk from far with containers to carry back water to their houses, and they still ration the scarce commodity in their houses. But at least they now know that what they are drinking is not harmful to their health.

'Police can help improve child repression situation'

By Staff Correspondent

Laws regarding children in the country are being widely violated due to lack of proper knowledge and unwillingness of law enforcing agencies, speakers at a seminar said yesterday.

The speakers were addressing in a seminar on 'Child Rights and Laws Relating to Children and Juvenile Justice' organised by Bangladesh Retired Police Officer Welfare Association (BRPOWA).

"If the police change their attitude towards juveniles, it could help improve the juvenile-repression scenario," Nurul Huda, Inspector General of Police who attended the programme as the chief guest said in his speech.

He also said that the court premises no longer remain safe place, adding that child and women repression acts are randomly violated in the country.

The function was presided over by Kazi Anwarul Haq, former Inspector General of Police, former secretary and former minister.

The keynote paper read out by former secretary

and president of BRPOWA. The paper pointed out that 3,455 children were arrested on various charges since 1990 till date. Of them, only 622 were sent to the correction homes.

The juvenile laws ensures the rights of the child but its implementation has not been encouraging at all. The Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Sallandra Kumer Adhikari said that appropriate use of the law is absent in the country.

"During a recent visit to a jail, I saw 100 children aged between 10 and 14 years and 10 children aged between 6 and 8 years of age languishing there," he said.

Speakers mentioned that according to existing laws in case, a child is arrested, his or her parents must be notified immediately and the juvenile must be accommodated separately from other prisoners. This is seldom followed.

Vice-president of BRPOWA Salauddin Ahmed, general secretary Aminul Islam Mia and other former police high officials attended the function.

Redesign healthcare system

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purpose of the donors?

Dr Enamul Karim, Deputy Team Leader of government's Management Change Unit, said, the doctor-patient ratio is about 1/600 in urban areas and 1/20,000 in rural areas.

He however said the planned Essential Services Package (ESP) will benefit the rural poor.

Dr Quazi Quamruzzaman, Chairman of Dhaka Community Hospital Trust, said, the government is not designing need-based programmes.

Giving an example, he said, about four and a half million dollars have been allocated on emergency basis to address the arsenic problem. But most of it is being spent on motivation and communication. There is virtually no provision for treatment of arsenic patients.

He also said that professional bodies rarely participate in policy framing. Instead, foreign consultants who have no idea about the needs design policies.

Dr A M Zakir Hossain, Consultant of ADB's Urban Primary Healthcare Project, identified bad management as the number one

problem in healthcare system. "We only try to manage crises but do not work with definite objectives."

Dr Naila Khan of Dhaka Shishu Hospital said budgetary allocation for the health sector should be increased.

Prof Abu Barakat of economics department of Dhaka University said, by 2010, the urban population will grow by one crore and half of them will be slum dwellers. "What planning is being done to address this issue?" he asked.

Leprosy and tuberculosis can be controlled with the money spent for purchasing the five Russian MIG fighter aircraft, he claimed.

Dr Zahid Hossain said, in two and a half years, there has been no visible progress in implementation of HPSF due to poor planning and non-disbursement of funds.

Dr Zeba Mahmud, a nutrition specialist of BRAC pointed out that majority of the people do not know about their healthcare rights. The services would have improved much had the people been aware of their rights, she

said. Barrister Omar Sadat said there should be an 'Health Act' and 'Health Courts' so that affected persons can sue doctors or institutions for negligence of duty.

Dr A M Shameem, Managing Director of Lab Aid, suggested privatisation of government hospitals to improve services.

Dr Khairul Islam, General Secretary of Public Health Association of Bangladesh, suggested that the government should study the health insurance models, now on trial by some NGOs in rural areas. A national health insurance policy can be developed, which will benefit the rural poor, he added.

The Daily Star will organise a series of roundtable discussions in divisional headquarters so that all concerned can give their suggestions to overcome the existing problems in the healthcare system in the country.

Mahfuz Anam, Editor of The Daily Star moderated yesterday's roundtable, held at the seminar room of Press Institute of Bangladesh (PIB). Dr Morshed Rubaiul assisted him.



World Bank Sector Director for Environment Richard Ackermann inspecting the bank sponsored month-long auto-clinic for baby taxis yesterday at Kalyanpur Bus Depot to help reduce the damaging health impacts of air pollution from vehicle emission, the importance of using the right lubricant in correct quantity and good engine management for cutting emissions from baby taxis.

ALCWC condemns attack on Palestinians

A meeting of the Awami League Central Working Committee yesterday evening condemned the recent Israeli attack on Palestinian people and called for a peaceful solution to Middle East issue through negotiations, reports BSS.

The meeting, held with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in the chair at her Gahabhaban official residence, condemned the Israeli raid on the residence of Palestinian President Yasser Arafat.

The meeting expressed its dismay and indignation for not allowing the Muslim devotees to offer Jumma prayers at the holy Al Aska mosque by Israeli forces.

The meeting reviewed the latest flood situation in the south-western districts of the country and decided to launch massive relief and rehabilitation programme for ameliorating the sufferings of the affected people.

Amu acting AL president

AL Presidium Member and Food Minister Amir Hossain Amu will act as the acting president of the party during the absence of party President and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

Amu was made acting president at its ALCWC meeting.

President

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Sharsha, Kolaroa, Ashashuni, Tala and Satkhira sadar upazilas, he said.

Gen Ashfaq said members of armed forces with the help of BAF helicopter and Navy boats conducted massive rescue and relief operations in the flood-hit areas and assisted the civil administration.

Deputy Commissioner of Satkhira Abdul Matin Chowdhury informed the President that about five lakh people of the district were affected.

He said about 39,000 square kilometre area in seven upazilas including Sadar and Paura areas, Tala, Kolaroa, Ashashuni, and Devhata were inundated, causing colossal damage to crops and houses.

Of the total, some four lakh people were given shelter at 380 flood centres, he informed.

After the briefing, the President visited some temporary relief camps at the local BADC godown, Satkhira Government High School and Talata Primary and High School premises.

He talked to some flood affected people in those camps and enquired about the relief distribution.

While returning to Dhaka, the President also flew over Benapole Land Port and some other flood-hit areas and saw the damage, a Gahabhaban press release said.

Dinajpur rally

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venue for the alliance leaders.

Referring to the Prime Minister's remark that her party would return to power by any means, she warned that the people would resist any foul means of the ruling party at any cost.

The opposition leaders announced a fresh programme for their ongoing movement saying the government would be forced to quit in time as new programme is launched.

The new programme included countryside demonstration on October 24 to protest price hike of gas, fuel oil and electricity and conspiracy to sell out goods.

The opposition alliance will hold a combined rally in the capital on November 7.

Accusing the government of hatching a conspiracy to export gas to India, Khaleda said it would not be allowed to do so. "People will resist this conspiracy at any cost."

Blaming the ruling party for using administration in organising its public meetings, she said people join the opposition meetings spontaneously but the ruling party arranges their rallies adopting unfair means.

The former Prime Minister urged the police administration to discharge their duties neutrally. "We are keeping a close watch on government officials to see who are performing their duties neutrally and who are trying to please the ruling party," she said sounding a note of warning.

In her 40-minute speech, she said the ruling party has failed in all sectors. "People are not secure under the rule of this government. There is no law and order in the country."

Sirajganj AL factions clash

By Our Correspondent

SIRAJGANJ, Oct 14: At least 15 persons were injured and three shops ransacked when two groups of ruling Awami League (AL) locked in a clash at Sonamukhi Bazar under Kaziur thana here yesterday night.

The clash between two factions, one led by Shorab Ali and another by Shahjahan Ali, began at around 10:00 pm following a conflict over sharing of proceeds from a local fair organised to mark the Durga Puja, police said.

The clash continued for about half an hour and both groups used sticks, hockey-sticks and axes and other sharp weapons, police said.

Coalition seems to stay

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After Vajpayee himself assured Mamata of a re-look at the decision to increase petro products prices, it was certain that the Trinamool Congress chief would reciprocate positively, withdraw her resignation and stay in the National Democratic Alliance (NDA).

Earlier, Vajpayee had successfully staved off pressures from allies like Punjab's Akali Dal and Orissa's Biju Janata Dal (BJD) to push through certain key administrative decisions of his government relating to the creation of new states.

This underscores the perception that it less because of the alliance or BJP but more due to Vajpayee's personal image that NDA had won the general elections last year.

It is in the economic sector that Vajpayee government encountered the strongest challenge from BJP's spiritual mentor RSS and its frontal outfits as well as mainstream opposition, particularly the left parties.

The second generation of economic reforms initiated by the government included opening up of several key sectors, including insurance, to foreign investments, privatization of leading public sector undertakings and Foreign Exchange Management Act.

The measures drew loud protests from RSS which accused the government of going back on

economic nationalism and left parties. Samajwadi Party of Mulayam Singh Yadav and Rashtriya Janata Dal headed by Laloo Yadav which charged that the country was being "sold out" to IMF and World Bank. Even some constituents of BJP were also not sure about the government's economic policies as their appreciative result was yet to be felt. But Vajpayee stuck to his ground.

Perhaps the biggest achievement of Vajpayee government in the last one year was on the diplomatic front as India was well on course for coming out of the international isolation soon after the nuclear tests of 1998 (during Vajpayee's previous stint as Prime Minister).

The United States and Western countries came round to engage themselves in sustained dialogue with India on a host of bilateral and international issues, including the sensitive subject of nuclear non-proliferation with much greater appreciation, if not acceptance, of New Delhi's security concerns and views on nuclear disarmament.

The road for India's return to international focus was laid by US President Bill Clinton's successful visit to India in March which was followed by trips by leaders of Australia, Germany and Britain.

Vajpayee himself visited the US last month and attended for the first-ever summit between India and the European Union in July.

No doubt, much of the credit for India's diplomatic gains goes to the remarkable responsibility showed by India as a nuclear power state and the restraint displayed in responding to Pakistan's extremely provocative postures, particularly Islamabad's intrusion in Kargil in early 1999.

Despite New Delhi's growing proximity with Washington over the last two years, India's ties with Russia were given a major thrust with the recent visit Russian President Vladimir Putin and the signing of several agreements including one for supply of tanks, fighter planes and an aircraft carrier to India.

The government faced another major challenge when the Indian Airlines plane was hijacked from Kathmandu in December 1999 to Taliban-controlled Afghanistan. The government had come under attacks from opposition parties at home for its handling of the crisis, especially its 'failure' to stop the plane from taking off from Amritsar in India, where it had landed before flying to Lahore.

Another major opposition criticism of government was external Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh accompanying Masood Azhar, the Pakistani militant leader who had to be freed in return for the release of Indian Airlines planes hostages.

Political parties should discard

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concerned about."

"Foreign investors have found Bangladesh an attractive place, which offers low wage rate but high rate of profitability. They come here with the hope of profit and also the risk in the back of their mind."

The minister said the existing law and order much better than it was during the tenure of the previous government. Barring some isolated incidents in Dhaka, the overall situation across the country is satisfactory, said Kibria.

During his nearly two-hour deliberation, Kibria gave a brief resumé of the government's efforts in the sectors of agriculture, economy, education and infrastructure in the last four years. Apart from economic issues, he also responded to questions on politics.

DRU President M Anwarul Haq was in the chair while its General Secretary Monwarul Islam conducted the programme.

Kibria, who also heads the ruling Awami League's Election

Conducting Committee, said the next general elections would be the "unfinished chapter of the 1971 Liberation War."

The election would witness a clear contest between the pro and anti-Liberation forces, he said. He believed that the proliferation and pro-democracy forces will come out with an overwhelming majority defeating the opposition alliance of autocrats and razzaks.

Brushing aside the doubts already cast by a section of politicians about the upcoming elections, the minister said such politicians do not believe in democracy.

UNB adds: Kibria was critical of the "wrong" tariff policy pursued by his predecessor M Saifur Rahman whom he accused of destroying a budding domestic industry and forcing many units to become sick.

Balance of payment remains favourable despite increased imports of capital machinery putting some pressure on foreign currency reserve. Forex reserve would be around US\$1,400 to

1,500 million that the Finance Minister called "more or less stable" but felt it should have been more.

Both exports and overseas remittance have increased, he said and informed the reporters about the government's strong stand against hundi.

We also stated the budgetary incentives offered for the growth of capital market. He said central depository system (CDS) will be introduced within a month or two which, he hoped, will elevate the standard of the share market to international level.

He contradicted recent press reports that donors are unhappy over the government's failure to place a need assessment for flood recovery.

It was not a formal meeting with the donors, rather a consultation between the government and the chiefs of some 3 or 4 international agencies, the finance minister explained.

He said the world must invest the donors after having an assessment of flood losses when waters recede.

TFCA accord

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tropical forest in a way that one does not take priority over the other so that plants, animals and humans can live. Not only the Sundarbans, but other forests in Bangladesh will be protected by this Fund," Hester explained.

This agreement on debt reduction for nature swap synchronises with a \$105,000 United Nations Foundation (UNF) grant to develop a cross-border initiative for conservation and management of the Sundarbans World Heritage Sites (WHS) and the surrounding areas in Bangladesh and India.

Both the governments of Bangladesh and India have committed considerable resources toward conservation of the sites. The additional resources sought from the UNF will enhance cross-border cooperation to protect the bio-diversity through common strategies.

"If the two countries accept the UN Foundation planning grant, it will be the first time that India and Bangladesh will be working together in the environmental arena. Given the tense relations

in South Asia, I believe it is important that the countries work together in areas that are less controversial and are more likely to generate cooperation. Environment is certainly such an area and the Sundarbans has the potential to bring the two countries together in ways that will benefit both the local people and the bio-diversity, especially the Royal Bengal tiger, whose future is at a critical juncture," said Seema Paul, Program Officer for Biodiversity at UN Foundation in Washington DC.

US President Bill Clinton promised debt reduction for nature swap to Bangladesh during his visit to Dhaka early this year.

The Sundarbans, covering about 10,000 square kilometers of mangrove forest in India and Bangladesh along the Bay of Bengal is one of the great coastal wetland ecosystems left in the world.

Unlike many past and ongoing initiatives in the Sundarbans, UNDP proposes to assist the two countries in shaping a common approach, if possible, a joint management plan.

Investment protection

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country found better investment opportunities in Bangladesh, they would come to put their money here.

Your labour force has to be skilled and little more educated so that Swiss investors can get them jobs," said Deiss.

Briefing newsmen about the meeting with his Bangladesh counterpart Abdus Samad Azad, the Swiss foreign minister said he had talks on investment prospects and possibilities as well as on regional politics.

He said Switzerland appreciated Bangladesh's role in promotion of peace in the region.

On the question of the agreement, the Swiss minister said such agreements guarantee an increased legal security and protect against arbitrariness. "They (agreements) play a crucial role in improving the legal framework in order to attract foreign investors and contribute to a good investment climate within the contracting parties."

Deiss put accent on the need for boosting up trade volumes between the two countries, which is now marginally in favour of Switzerland. Bangladesh's exports to Switzerland was worth 45 million Swiss francs (equivalent to 30 million US dollars) while its import from that country was 46 million Swiss francs in 1999.

He, however, said that Swiss Office for Facilitating Imports

(SOFI) is willing to help increase Bangladesh's export volume to Switzerland. Up to last year, direct Swiss assistance to Bangladesh amounted to about 235 million US dollars, he said.

The visiting minister recalled that agreement of cooperation between Switzerland and Bangladesh dates back 25 years when the two governments had signed a framework agreement on technical cooperation. The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), through which the Swiss government channels its development funds, opened a coordination office in Dhaka in 1981, he added.

Some 180 Bangladeshis are living in his country without proper authorisation, Deiss said and added that Swiss government would consider the issue.

He told newsmen that in response to the current flooding, Switzerland, in its first reaction, has donated Tk 7.5 million.

The Swiss Minister, who arrived in Dhaka on October 13 on a three-day visit to Bangladesh, had a separate meeting with the Finance Minister Shah AMS Kibria and made a courtesy call on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina last night.

Deiss is scheduled to make a courtesy call on President Shahabuddin Ahmed this morning and visit some Swiss-funded development projects in Dhaka.